

**TOXICOLOGICAL PROFILE FOR  
CYANIDE**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Public Health Service  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry**

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The use of company or product name(s) is for identification only and does not imply endorsement by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

**UPDATE STATEMENT**

A Toxicological Profile for cyanide was released in April 1993. This edition supersedes any previously released draft or final profile.

Toxicological profiles are revised and republished as necessary, but no less than once every three years. For information regarding the update status of previously released profiles, contact ATSDR at:

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## FOREWORD

This toxicological profile is prepared in accordance with guidelines\* developed by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The original guidelines were published in the *Federal Register* on April 17, 1987. Each profile will be revised and republished as necessary.

The ATSDR toxicological profile succinctly characterizes the toxicologic and adverse health effects information for the hazardous substance described therein. Each peer-reviewed profile identifies and reviews the key literature that describes a hazardous substance's toxicologic properties. Other pertinent literature is also presented, but is described in less detail than the key studies. The profile is not intended to be an exhaustive document; however, more comprehensive sources of specialty information are referenced.

The focus of the profiles is on health and toxicologic information; therefore, each toxicological profile begins with a public health statement that describes, in nontechnical language, a substance's relevant toxicological properties. Following the public health statement is information concerning levels of significant human exposure and, where known, significant health effects. The adequacy of information to determine a substance's health effects is described in a health effects summary. Data needs that are of significance to protection of public health are identified by ATSDR and EPA.

Each profile includes the following:

- (A) The examination, summary, and interpretation of available toxicologic information and epidemiologic evaluations on a hazardous substance to ascertain the levels of significant human exposure for the substance and the associated acute, subacute, and chronic health effects;
- (B) A determination of whether adequate information on the health effects of each substance is available or in the process of development to determine levels of exposure that present a significant risk to human health of acute, subacute, and chronic health effects; and
- (C) Where appropriate, identification of toxicologic testing needed to identify the types or levels of exposure that may present significant risk of adverse health effects in humans.

The principal audiences for the toxicological profiles are health professionals at the Federal, State, and local levels; interested private sector organizations and groups; and members of the public.

This profile reflects ATSDR's assessment of all relevant toxicologic testing and information that has been peer-reviewed. Staff of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other Federal scientists have also reviewed the profile. In addition, this profile has been peer-reviewed by a nongovernmental panel and was made available for public review. Final responsibility for the contents and views expressed in this toxicological profile resides with ATSDR.



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### \*Legislative Background

The toxicological profiles are developed in response to the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) of 1986 (Public Law 99-499) which amended the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA or Superfund). This public law directed ATSDR to prepare toxicological profiles for hazardous substances most commonly found at facilities on the CERCLA National Priorities List and that pose the most significant potential threat to human health, as determined by ATSDR and the EPA. The availability of the revised priority list of 275 hazardous substances was announced in the *Federal Register* on April 29, 1996 (61 FR 18744). For prior versions of the list of substances, see *Federal Register* notices dated April 17, 1987 (52 FR 12866); October 20, 1988 (53 FR 41280); October 26, 1989 (54 FR 43619); October 17, 1990 (55 FR 42067); October 17, 1991 (56 FR 52166); October 28, 1992 (57 FR 48801); and February 28, 1994 (59 FR 9486). Section 104(i)(3) of CERCLA, as amended, directs the Administrator of ATSDR to prepare a toxicological profile for each substance on the list.

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**THE PROFILE HAS UNDERGONE THE FOLLOWING ATSDR INTERNAL REVIEWS:**

1. Green Border Review. Green Border review assures consistency with ATSDR policy.
2. Health Effects Review. The Health Effects Review Committee examines the health effects chapter of each profile for consistency and accuracy in interpreting health effects and classifying end points.
3. Minimal Risk Level Review. The Minimal Risk Level Workgroup considers issues relevant to substance-specific minimal risk levels (MRLs), reviews the health effects database of each profile, and makes recommendations for derivation of MRLs.



### PEER REVIEW

A peer review panel was assembled for cyanide. The panel consisted of the following members:

1. Dr. Gary Isom, Professor of Toxicology, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana;
2. Dr. James Way, Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology, Department of Medical Pharmacology and Toxicology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas; and
3. Dr. Joseph Borowitz, Professor of Pathology, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, School of Pharmacy and Pharmacal Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana;

These experts collectively have knowledge of cyanide's physical and chemical properties, toxicokinetics, key health end points, mechanisms of action, human and animal exposure, and quantification of risk to humans. All reviewers were selected in conformity with the conditions for peer review specified in Section 104(i)(13) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, *as amended*.

Scientists from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) have reviewed the peer reviewers' comments and determined which comments will be included in the profile. A listing of the peer reviewers' comments not incorporated in the profile, with a brief explanation of the rationale for their exclusion, exists as part of the administrative record for this compound. A list of databases reviewed and a list of unpublished documents cited are also included in the administrative record.

The citation of the peer review panel should not be understood to imply its approval of the profile's final content. The responsibility for the content of this profile lies with the ATSDR.



## CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	v
CONTRIBUTORS .....	vii
PEER REVIEW .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xv
LIST OF TABLES .....	xvii
<b>1. PUBLIC HEALTH STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 WHAT IS CYANIDE? .....	1
1.2 WHAT HAPPENS TO CYANIDE WHEN IT ENTERS THE ENVIRONMENT? .....	3
1.3 HOW MIGHT I BE EXPOSED TO CYANIDE? .....	4
1.4 HOW CAN CYANIDE ENTER AND LEAVE MY BODY? .....	5
1.5 HOW CAN CYANIDE AFFECT MY HEALTH? .....	6
1.6 IS THERE A MEDICAL TEST TO DETERMINE WHETHER I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO CYANIDE? .....	7
1.7 WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS HAS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MADE TO PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH? .....	8
1.8 WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? .....	9
<b>2. HEALTH EFFECTS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	11
2.2 DISCUSSION OF HEALTH EFFECTS BY ROUTE OF EXPOSURE .....	11
2.2.1 Inhalation Exposure .....	13
2.2.1.1 Death .....	13
2.2.1.2 Systemic Effects .....	14
2.2.1.3 Immunological and Lymphoreticular Effects .....	25
2.2.1.4 Neurological Effects .....	25
2.2.1.5 Reproductive Effects .....	27
2.2.1.6 Developmental Effects .....	27
2.2.1.7 Genotoxic Effects .....	27
2.2.1.8 Cancer .....	27
2.2.2 Oral Exposure .....	28
2.2.2.1 Death .....	28
2.2.2.2 Systemic Effects .....	40
2.2.2.3 Immunological and Lymphoreticular Effects .....	46
2.2.2.4 Neurological Effects .....	46
2.2.2.5 Reproductive Effects .....	48
2.2.2.6 Developmental Effects .....	49
2.2.2.7 Genotoxic Effects .....	50
2.2.2.8 Cancer .....	50
2.2.3 Dermal Exposure .....	50
2.2.3.1 Death .....	50
2.2.3.2 Systemic Effects .....	51
2.2.3.3 Immunological and Lymphoreticular Effects .....	54

2.2.3.4	Neurological Effects	55
2.2.3.5	Reproductive Effects	55
2.2.3.6	Developmental Effects	55
2.2.3.7	Genotoxic Effects	55
2.2.3.8	Cancer	56
2.3	TOXICOKINETICS	56
2.3.1	Absorption	56
2.3.1.1	Inhalation Exposure	56
2.3.1.2	Oral Exposure	56
2.3.1.3	Dermal Exposure	57
2.3.2	Distribution	58
2.3.2.1	Inhalation Exposure	58
2.3.2.2	Oral Exposure	58
2.3.2.3	Dermal Exposure	60
2.3.3	Metabolism	60
2.3.4	Elimination and Excretion	64
2.3.4.1	Inhalation Exposure	64
2.3.4.2	Oral Exposure	64
2.3.4.3	Dermal Exposure	65
2.3.5	Physiologically Based Pharmacokinetic (PBPK)/Pharmacodynamic (PD) Models	65
2.4	MECHANISMS OF ACTION	66
2.4.1	Pharmacokinetic Mechanisms	66
2.4.2	Mechanisms of Toxicity	70
2.4.3	Animal-to-Human Extrapolations	75
2.5	RELEVANCE TO PUBLIC HEALTH	76
2.6	BIOMARKERS OF EXPOSURE AND EFFECT	92
2.6.1	Biomarkers Used to Identify or Quantify Exposure to Cyanide	93
2.6.2	Biomarkers Used to Characterize Effects Caused by Cyanide	95
2.7	INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER CHEMICALS	95
2.8	POPULATIONS THAT ARE UNUSUALLY SUSCEPTIBLE	99
2.9	METHODS FOR REDUCING TOXIC EFFECTS	100
2.9.1	Reducing Peak Absorption Following Exposure	100
2.9.2	Reducing Body Burden	101
2.9.3	Interfering with the Mechanism of Action for Toxic Effects	102
2.10	ADEQUACY OF THE DATABASE	103
2.10.1	Existing Information on Health Effects of Cyanide	104
2.10.2	Identification of Data Needs	106
2.10.3	Ongoing Studies	111
3.	CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL INFORMATION	113
3.1	CHEMICAL IDENTITY	113
3.2	PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PROPERTIES	113
4.	PRODUCTION, IMPORT/EXPORT, USE, AND DISPOSAL	123
4.1	PRODUCTION	123
4.2	IMPORT/EXPORT	127
4.3	USE	127
4.4	DISPOSAL	130

5. POTENTIAL FOR HUMAN EXPOSURE .....	133
5.1 OVERVIEW .....	133
5.2 RELEASES TO THE ENVIRONMENT .....	137
5.2.1 Air .....	137
5.2.2 Water .....	138
5.2.3 Soil .....	143
5.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FATE .....	144
5.3.1 Transport and Partitioning .....	144
5.3.2 Transformation and Degradation .....	147
5.3.2.1 Air .....	147
5.3.2.2 Water .....	150
5.3.2.3 Sediment and Soil .....	154
5.4 LEVELS MONITORED OR ESTIMATED IN THE ENVIRONMENT .....	155
5.4.1 Air .....	155
5.4.2 Water .....	156
5.4.3 Sediment and Soil .....	157
5.4.4 Other Environmental Media .....	158
5.5 GENERAL POPULATION AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE .....	161
5.6 POPULATIONS WITH POTENTIALLY HIGH EXPOSURES .....	166
5.7 ADEQUACY OF THE DATABASE .....	167
5.7.1 Identification of Data Needs .....	167
5.7.2 Ongoing Studies .....	171
6. ANALYTICAL METHODS .....	175
6.1 BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES .....	175
6.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES .....	179
6.3 ADEQUACY OF THE DATABASE .....	185
6.3.1 Identification of Data Needs .....	186
6.3.2 Ongoing Studies .....	188
7. REGULATIONS AND ADVISORIES .....	191
8. REFERENCES .....	217
9. GLOSSARY .....	253
APPENDICES	
A. ATSDR MINIMAL RISK LEVEL .....	A-1
B. USER'S GUIDE .....	B-1
C. ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND SYMBOLS .....	C-1



## LIST OF FIGURES

2-1	Levels of Significant Exposure to Cyanide - Inhalation .....	19
2-2	Levels of Significant Exposure to Cyanide - Oral .....	37
2-3	Basic Processes Involved in the Metabolism of Cyanide .....	61
2-4	Minor Path for the Removal of Cyanide from the Body .....	63
2-5	Conceptual Representation of a Physiologically Based Pharmacokinetic (PBPK) Model for a Hypothetical Chemical Substance .....	67
2-6	Existing Information on Health Effects of Cyanide .....	105
5-1	Frequency of NPL Sites with Cyanide Contamination .....	134



**LIST OF TABLES**

2-1	Levels of Significant Exposure to Cyanide - Inhalation .....	15
2-2	Levels of Significant Exposure to Cyanide - Oral .....	29
2-3	Levels of Significant Exposure to Cyanide - Dermal .....	52
2-4	Genotoxicity of Cyanide <i>In Vitro</i> .....	91
3-1	Chemical Identity of Cyanide and Compounds .....	114
3-2	Physical and Chemical Properties of Cyanide and Compounds .....	117
4-1	Facilities That Manufacture or Process Hydrogen Cyanide .....	125
4-2	Import and Export Volumes of Cyanide Compounds .....	128
5-1	Releases to the Environment From Facilities That Manufacture or Process Hydrogen Cyanide ..	139
5-2	Environmental Transformation Products of Cyanide Compounds by Medium .....	148
5-3	Cyanide and Thiocyanate Concentrations ( $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ) in Smokers and Nonsmokers .....	164
6-1	Analytical Methods for Determining Cyanide in Biological Samples .....	176
6-2	Analytical Methods for Determining Cyanide in Environmental Samples .....	180
6-3	Analytical Methods for Determining Environmental Degradation Products of Cyanide .....	187
6-4	Analytical Methods for Determining Biomarkers for Cyanide .....	189
7-1	Regulations and Guidelines Applicable to Cyanide .....	193

